

# ***Post-World War II Temporary Classrooms at the University of Minnesota: The Student Experience of the Built Environment***

JACOB TORKELSON

[This project was funded by the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, Spring 2017]

In the midst of the post-war enrollment boom at universities across the nation, a behemoth of a building makes its way down the winding side streets of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The two story wood-framed structure sits precariously on the bed of a truck that seems much too small to hold the giant building. Splintered siding and cutaway walls offer penetrating views into the structure, while the missing roof makes the building look like something salvaged from a war zone. Telephone and street car lines have been removed for the building's voyage. Tiny wheels creak under the weight of just one of six pieces that are being transported from Wold-Chamberlain airbase in St. Paul to their final destination at the University of Minnesota, a distance of over six miles. Crowds gather as the piece rolls down

neighborhood streets; a man waves from the top at people gathered below.

This former barracks from the naval air station at Wold-Chamberlain field, and 18 other similar structures were reassembled as temporary classroom buildings on the University of Minnesota campus in an effort to provide space for the burgeoning post-World War II student enrollment. As veterans returned from World War Two in 1945, many of them chose to seek a university education as part of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of

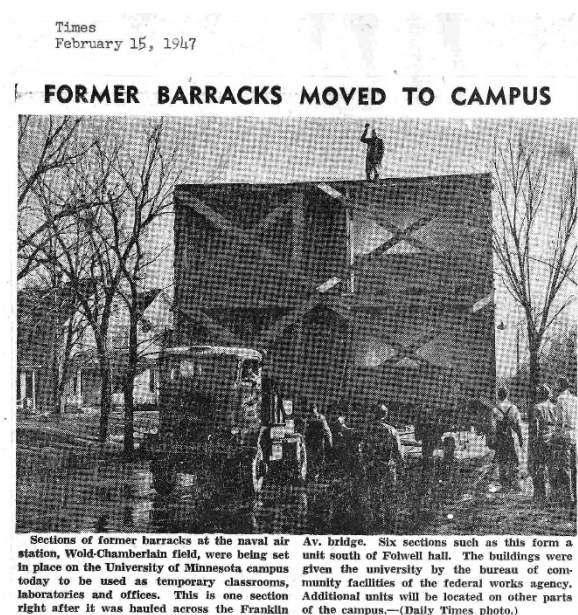


Figure 1: One piece of a temporary classroom building is being transported to the U of M. (Times February 15, 1947)

1944, commonly known as the GI Bill. The Servicemen's Readjustment act provided dedicated tuition, supplies, and living expenses to any veteran who wished to attend high school, vocational school, or college.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, colleges across the country experienced unprecedented and unanticipated growth. The University of Minnesota experienced some of the largest growth of any campus. With almost 27,000 students enrolled, Minnesota was the third largest student body in the nation, behind the University of California and Columbus University.<sup>2</sup> According to Vice President Middlebrook, the University of Minnesota "had the highest absolute and relative veteran enrollment in the country,"<sup>3</sup> Prior to the 1946-1947 school year, enrollment peaked at only 15,905 students, only 8,403 of which were veterans. Following the end of the war, nearly 17,000 veterans were enrolled, which composed almost two thirds of the student body.<sup>4</sup> One alumnus when reflecting on the situation remarked, "It will be recalled that space was at a premium back in 1940 when the total enrollment was near the 15,000 mark."<sup>5</sup>

Nearing double the pre-War enrollment, university administrators were willing to try almost anything to alleviate the stress such a large student body put on its resources. Officials lengthened the school day by starting earlier in the morning, and running courses well into the evening in the hope that more class times might ease the strain on facility use. The noon hour lunch break, or convocation hour, was eliminated so that courses could run nonstop throughout the day. Faculty and administrative offices were condensed to make room for more classroom space, while at the same time increasing the faculty to meet the educational demands of the new student body. One administrator lamented this fact, noting, "at the present time four instructors have been put into cubicles where one instructor was

---

<sup>1</sup> *Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (Public Law 346, 78th Congress, June 22, 1944)*

<sup>2</sup> "News and Views," *Minnesota Alumnus* 46, no. 2 (1946): 65-66.

<sup>3</sup> Temporary Classroom Buildings Information File, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>4</sup> Justification of Need. Temporary Classroom Buildings, Central Files (1928-1972), Box 13, Folder 21. University of Minnesota Archives

<sup>5</sup> "News and Views," *Minnesota Alumnus* 46, no. 2 (1946): 65-66.

formerly accommodated.”<sup>6</sup> Space was at a premium, and every available nook and cranny was filled to serve some sort of academic function. The attic of Nicholson Hall crammed eighty instructors into its rafters, while at the same time the dressing rooms of Northrop auditorium were converted for use as faculty offices.<sup>7</sup>

The need for more space was clear, but the limited time frame and scarcity of resources following WWII greatly limited the erection of new facilities, leaving many at a loss of what to do. University comptroller L. R. Lundgren in a letter to C.W. Andersen of the Federal Works Agency bemoaned the situation:

We are already close to 26,000 [students] and by the time the Graduate School enrollment has been completed the aggregate enrollment will exceed 27,000. You will appreciate, therefore, that the acuity of the situation as described almost transcends imagination with the unprecedented and unanticipated deluge of veteran enrollments. Just how we will take care of the situation is beyond me at the moment since we have been swamped all day with telephone calls reporting inadequacy of classroom space and in many instances students have been forced to stand along walls during the entire period.<sup>8</sup>

The urgent and objectionable conditions at the University of Minnesota, expressed by Lundgren, echoed across campus. But just when the situation seemed beyond relief, the 1946-1947 Veterans’ Educational Facilities Program was passed and offered a much-needed solution to the strain on campus facilities. This new program was administered through the Federal Security Agency, U.S. Office of Education, Division Higher Education, through which surplus military and defense industry buildings could be deaccessioned for use by institutions of higher education.

In order to receive surplus buildings, commonly known as ‘war-wearies’, universities had to first scope out possible locations of surplus facilities, and then write a justification of need and submit it to the Division Office of the Bureau of Community Facilities within the Federal Works Agency.

---

<sup>6</sup> Justification of Need. Temporary Classroom Buildings, Central Files (1928-1972), Box 13, Folder 21. University of Minnesota Archives

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> L. R. Lundgren to C. W. Anderson, 30 October 1946, Box 13, Folder 21, University Central Files (1928-1973), University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

Representatives from the University of Minnesota scoured the surrounding regions, searching for surplus buildings that were federally owned. Officials found several buildings they believed could meet their needs six miles away at Wold-Chamberlain Field<sup>9</sup>, ten miles away at the Twin Cities Ordinance Plant (New Brighton, MN), and almost 300 miles away at an obscure military base in Ottumwa, Iowa.<sup>10</sup> After identifying possible resources, the University submitted a justification of need that broke down how each building would be used, which buildings at each location were desired, and what contents of the buildings they wished to be transported with the building if possible.

In total, the University received 19 ‘war-wearies’ that were moved by truck to the campus, adding to the fifty-some academic buildings already built by the university, increasing the buildings on campus by almost 40 percent.<sup>11</sup> The Federal Works Agency covered the expense of disassembling the buildings, moving them to the University, and re-assembling them according to the University’s plans. The University was responsible for providing the sites, landscaping, and utility hook-ups.<sup>12</sup> In total, the University paid only \$200,000 dollars for the installation of the 19 buildings it acquisitioned, or only ten percent of the total cost.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Wold-Chamberlain field is the former name of Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport. The name is a memorial to the first two Minnesota soldiers to die in World War I.

<sup>10</sup> University News Service Release, 15 August 1947, Temporary Classroom Buildings Information File, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>11</sup> Academic buildings are defined as those that support classroom, or learning functions. The count (to reach the number 50) was made based on a period map.

<sup>12</sup> University News Service Release, 15 August 1947, Temporary Classroom Buildings Information File, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>13</sup> University Update, November 1985, Temporary Classroom Buildings Information File, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

Each of these buildings was to serve a unique function, as designated in the University's



Figure 2: One section of Temporary South of Folwell (TSF) is being installed by workmen. (St. Paul Dispatch, 1947).

justification of need. In the document, administrators listed in order of “existing or impending need” the capacities needed: classrooms, laboratories, and drawing rooms; library overflow; offices for academic personnel; cafeteria; storage for hospital records to free up space for classrooms; and a community center for veterans. In each case, administrators were careful to note that “if any of these facilities have chairs, tables, desks, and the like we believe, and earnestly request that such items follow the building.”<sup>14</sup>

The first building to arrive on campus, the Temporary South of Folwell Hall, or TSF, was placed where Williamson Hall is today. TSF brought much needed relief to the overcrowded Folwell Hall, where 185 faculty members were housed in 58 offices, a rate of about 3 per office.<sup>15</sup> The building, moved from Wold-Chamberlain field, was two stories high, roughly H-shaped, and measured 26 feet by 100ft on each leg, and 28ft by 112 feet in the central portion. This building, although the first, would be one of four identical buildings moved from the air field to campus. One newspaper called it the “Stepchild of Folwell Hall,” noting “the classical architecture of the University of Minnesota campus had a non-classical rival today as workmen fitted into place sections of government surplus barracks for use.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Justification of Need, Temporary Classroom Buildings, Central Files (1928-1972), Box 13, Folder 21. University of Minnesota Archives.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> “‘Neo-Classic’ Wartime Architecture at the U,” *Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), Jan. 23, 1947.

Another identical building to TSF was placed where current day Johnston Hall is located. Called the Temporary North of Library, or TNL, this building provided overflow study space for libraries that were well past capacity. As administrators noted in their justification of need:

Over 1,100 veteran families will be living in trailers and Quonset huts. Veteran students so housed obviously must be provided with study space. The stadium which has no study facilities, is being used as quarters for single veterans. Existing dormitory rooms which were designed to accommodate two students each are being prepared for four. This further reduces the study space in the living rooms and will certainly force [students] to study elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

It was imperative, as administrators noted, that students be afforded spaces for study outside the classroom, after the school day ended. During this period, the administration was actively involved in shaping and providing for students outside of the classroom, as most were veterans, and the GI bill

called for their housing and education. Home life, often in the form of university provided military housing, was integrally related to surplus classroom and study space. If students could not get their homework done outside of the classroom, this could “quickly nullify the entire educational effort.”<sup>18</sup> Classroom space remained the dominant



PHYSICS—THE BOOKLET

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

*Figure 3:* Pictured: Temporary North of Library, across from Morrill Hall, where Johnston Hall is today. Tate Lab can be seen in the background.

issue for the administration, but as they note in the justification of need, housing at the time remained a pressing and largely unaddressed issue. As University President Morrill wrote, “only emergency

<sup>17</sup> Justification of Need, Temporary Classroom Buildings, Central Files (1928-1972), Box 13, Folder 21. University of Minnesota Archives.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

measures could prevent hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Minnesota veterans [from being] driven outside the state for educational opportunities.”<sup>19</sup>

Many other temporary structures dotted the University landscape in the early postwar years. TSV, or Temporary South of Vincent, was another of the large H-shaped structures from Wold-Chamberlain field. Unlike many of the other structures, it had a very specific use: drafting. Housed near the main engineering building, the space had minimal classroom space, and was used primarily as drawing rooms for the engineering college. Prior to TSV’s re-location, 5000 students were registered for drawing courses, with only 300 available places each term.<sup>20</sup> Two students were assigned to a desk simultaneously, and switched in and out with others throughout the day and into the evening.

The addition of 19 Temporary Classroom Buildings, immediately relieved overcrowded campus conditions in the fall semester of the 1946-1947 academic school year. Veterans returning from war were greeted with a familiar site upon arriving to campus. Military style buildings were numerous across the University and played a significant role in shaping the future growth of the campus in the postwar years. Students embraced the buildings as a necessary evil, believing that they would only be temporary, while new facilities were being designed to replace them. This belief, like the temporary classrooms became a running joke in the years to come.

### **The Personal Element**

A University spokesman proudly announced a new naming system to distinguish the newly acquired temporary classroom buildings:

---

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Stanford Lehmberg and Ann M. Pflaum, *The University of Minnesota: 1945-2000*, 7. For more information on post-War student housing, see Ann Pflaum’s chapter on “The Student Experience.”

<sup>20</sup> Justification of Need, Temporary Classroom Buildings, Central Files (1928-1972), Box 13, Folder 21. University of Minnesota Archives.

A system of letters has been used in naming the wooden structures, each designation starting with the letter "T" to denote the temporary nature of the building. This is followed by letters indicating the area in which the building is situated on campus.<sup>21</sup>

He went on to give a few examples. TSF he noted stands for Temporary South of Folwell, while TNCE stands for Temporary North Court of Engineering. Perhaps to the dismay of the administration, this naming system was not well received by the student body. Rather, they favored a more personal naming system in which they offered up several suggestions for potential names. Editors of the *Minnesota Daily* suggested, for example, that Temporary North of the Library be called "Booklet" (for obvious reasons they note), or the Temporary South of Vincent should be called Mrs. Murphy, as it is situated next to Murphy Hall. Other more obscure nicknames were lost to interpretation such as, "Orphan Annex, Slip Stick Hall, and Log Log Cabin."<sup>22</sup> As the editors noted, "it is doubtful that a student is ever going to bring himself to say, 'Meet me at 11:15 at TNHS,' or 'I gotta class in 202 TSCE.' Much less remember what the initials stand for."<sup>23</sup> Thus students adopted their own names for the impersonal and uniform buildings that dotted their campus.

### **Temporary? Classroom Buildings**

As the years went on, many of the student began to question the temporary nature of the 'Temporary' Classroom Buildings. One student, Tom Martinson, remembered creating a rather subtle prank to this end. He repainted the sign outside TSF to read "Permanent South of Folwell." Evidently he did a good enough job that it wasn't noticed for some time, suggesting that most students were just used to the truth of the statement.

---

<sup>21</sup> University News Service Release, Jan 24 1947, Temporary Classroom Buildings Information File, The University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>22</sup> "News and Views," *Minnesota Alumnus* 46, no. 2 (1946): 65-66.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



The first temporary structure to be razed in 1949, was 'Mrs. Murphy', or Temporary South of

Vincent, to make way for the social science building Ford

Hall. The building was demolished and sold for scrap.

Following a few years later was 'Booklet' or the Temporary

North of Library, replaced by Johnston Hall.<sup>24</sup> In the

immediate years following their re-location, the temporary

nature of the buildings seemed to be living up to their

name. As University President James Morrill recalls, "We

dragged as many temporaries as we could get out hands

on to campus." He goes on to say the he did he best to

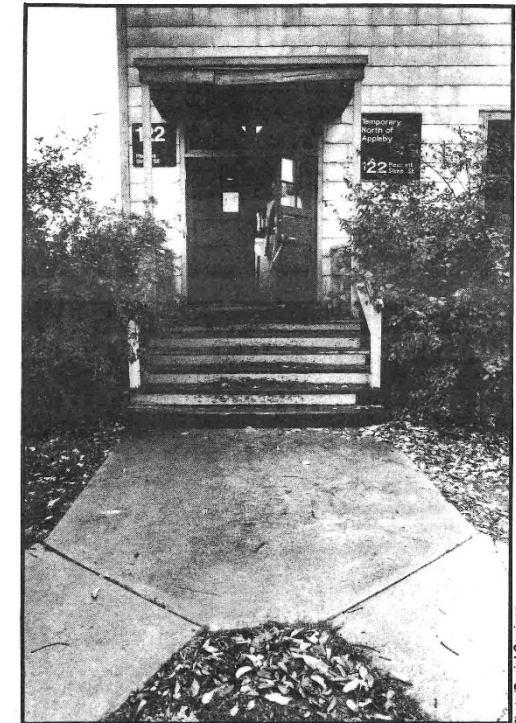
make sure that these buildings were actually temporary.

Prior to his tenure at the University of Minnesota, he came

from Ohio State University, whose campus, he notes, still

had temporary buildings from World War I. According to

Morrill, "[buildings] were deliberately placed in likely sites



Temporary North of Appleby may finally be torn down to make way for an addition to Appleby Hall.

Figure 4: Temporary North of Appleby was the last temporary to be razed. The decrepit conditions of the building that lasted almost 40 years are evident.

for future buildings." True to his statement, several of the buildings were soon demolished for new construction.

Despite Morrill's best efforts, many of the buildings remained for several more decades. One student noted that it was perhaps best to take the word 'temporary' "with a grain of salt."<sup>25</sup> Temporary South of Folwell, 'Doepke Hall', remained for 25 years until its demolition in 1973, replaced by current day Williamson Hall. As the caption notes in all caps, "Temporary South of Folwell is Gone, (Permanently). Several University Officials found maintenance costs and other issues of temporary

<sup>24</sup> *The Minnesotan*, December 1952, Temporary Classroom Buildings Information File, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>25</sup> *Minnesota Daily*, August 25, 1987.

structures to outweigh their benefits. Roy Lund, supervising engineer for the University, recalled that because the structures were made of wood, they would “require a lot of upkeep”, and “require a great deal of care.”<sup>26</sup> The decrepit conditions of the buildings, largely a factor of their temporary nature, ultimately led to their downfall.

***“And then there was one”<sup>27</sup>***



The last temporary structure to be demolished, Temporary North of Appleby, was razed in 1949 amid much fanfare. A ceremony was held for the demolition of the building in which a color guard and bugler played the national anthem before University officials swung sledgehammers at the building in front of a crowd of observers. Predominately, the feeling in the air was of jubilation. But, as a reporter for the *Minnesota Daily* wrote, maybe this shouldn’t have been the case:

While there is little about TNA’s passing that will cause remorse—occupants complain of bugs, its dowdy appearance and lack of security—its destruction represents the end of an era. TNA will pass, like the thousands of students who studied there, into obscurity.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps his sentiment is not unfounded, after all, “forty years is a long time to call something temporary.”<sup>29</sup> The fanfare and excitement that prevailed over its demolition also marked the fortieth anniversary of the erection of the building, a morbid birthday celebration if there ever was one.

Temporary classroom buildings played an essential role in shaping the University’s growth and student life in the years following World War Two, and this history has passed into obscurity, forgotten.

---

<sup>26</sup> University News Service, August 15 1947, Temporary Classroom Buildings Information File, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>27</sup> *Update*, November 1985. Temporary Classroom Buildings Information File, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>28</sup> J. Trout Lowen, “Temporary Buildings Have Historic Past,” *Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), Aug. 24, 1987.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

This period in the University's history was a one of great excitement and anticipation of wealth and growth, following a long and gruesome war. Education was open to all veterans, regardless of wealth, and created a new and hopeful generation. Composed of mostly mature veterans, the student body at this time was entirely different than any other in the University's history. Without these buildings to remind us of the extraordinary conditions of this formative period in the University's life, how can it be remembered? While all things eventually come to an end, and the temporary nature of these buildings conceivably predestined them to be so, the unique narrative of these buildings is perhaps not entirely lost to the arcane.

**MORELL & NICHOLS Inc.**  
**NICHOLS-NASON & CORNELL**  
**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**  
**MINNEAPOLIS MINNESOTA**

CASS GILBERT - CONSULTING ARCHITECT 1960  
C.H. JOHNSTON - ARCHITECTS  
J.M. FORSYTHE - ADVISORY ARCHITECT 1920-25  
F.M. MAHN - ADVISORY ARCHITECT  
ROY JONES - ADVISORY ARCHITECT

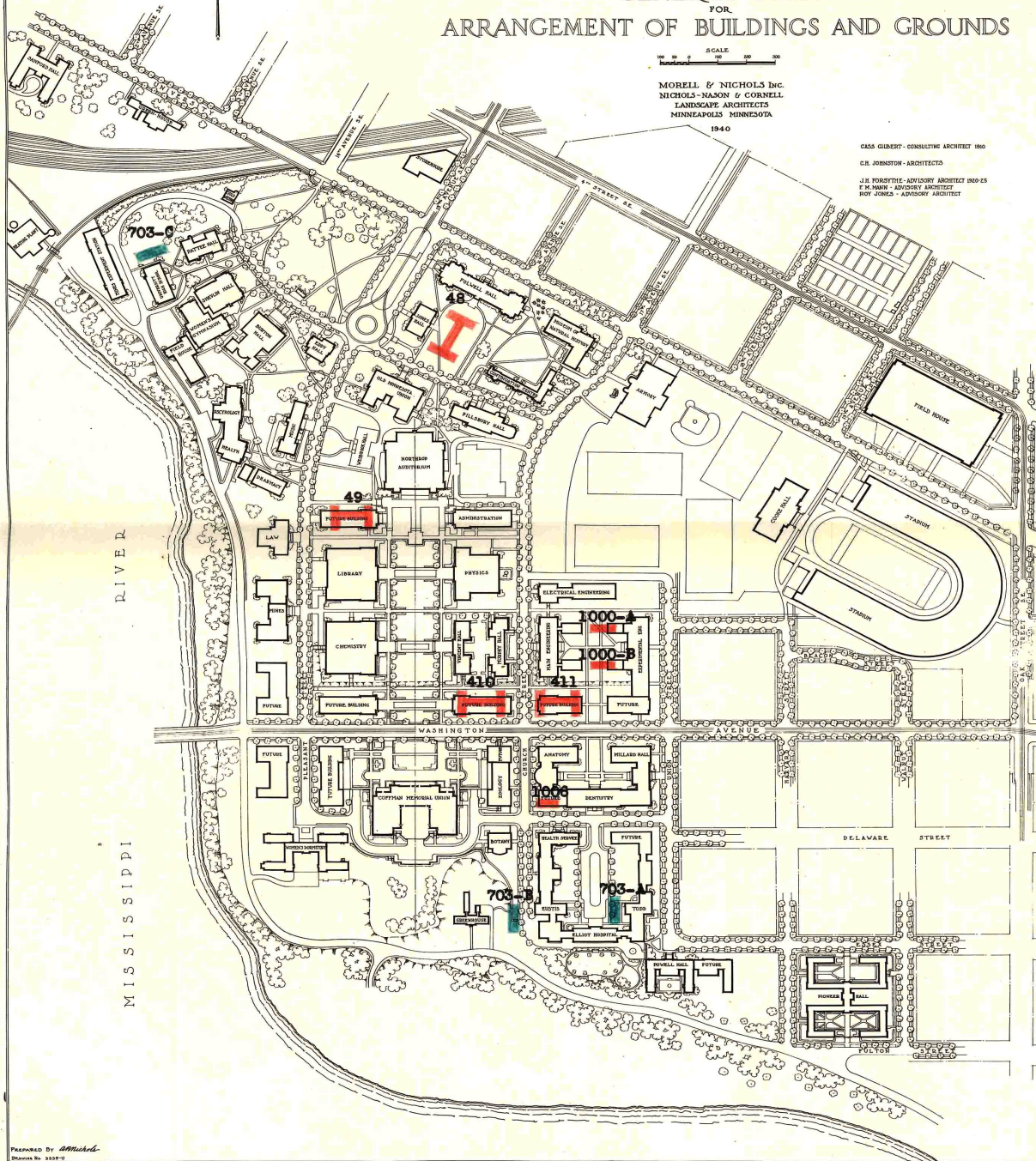
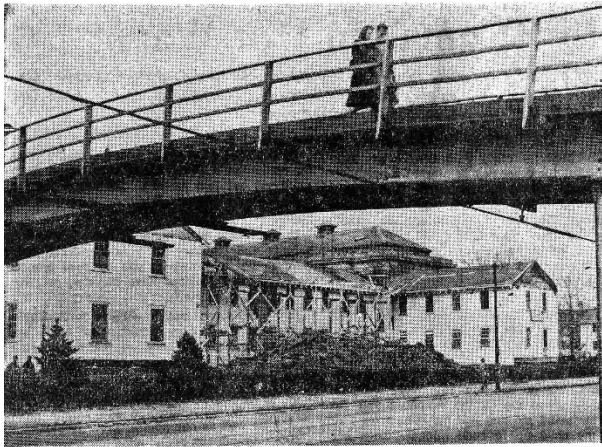


Figure 5: Map of the University of Minnesota East bank campus. The first crop of temporary structures are noted on the map in orange and teal. Several later structures from Iowa, are not noted on the map (e.g. three structures located south of mines where Bruinicks Hall is today, and Temporary North of Appleby, below Frasier Hall. (*BOR Supplements, Box 3, Folder: SM Building Miscellaneous Federal Works Agency.*)

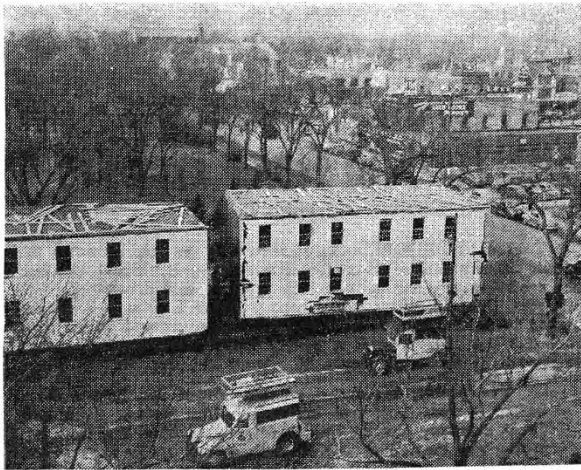


## NEO-CLASSIC' WARTIME ARCHITECTURE AT U



The classical architecture of the University of Minnesota campus mall had a wartime non-classical rival today as workmen fitted into place sections of government surplus naval air station barracks for use as classrooms, laboratories and lunchrooms. The frame buildings across Washington Av. S. from Coffman Memorial union will be utilized by the engineering departments. They will be used only until a new permanent building program can be completed.—(Daily Times photo by Tommy Lee.)

Figure 6: Temporary South of Vincent Hall, 'Mrs. Murphy', located where Amundson Hall is today. (*Minnesota Daily*)



**Stepchild** of Folwell hall is resting on Fifteenth avenue just off University avenue on its way to its new home in the vacant lot south of Folwell hall. The other four sections of the building, which is to be used for class rooms and Arts college staff offices, will follow soon.

Street car and telephone lines were raised so that the sections with the roofs removed could be moved down city streets from Wold-Chamberlain air field. The next building will be placed north of the library.

Figure 10: Temporary South of Folwell in transit to campus. The H-shaped building was broken into 6 parts. (*Times*)



Figure 7: Temporary South of Appleby, the last to be demolished (UAR Building File)



Figure 8: Temporary South of Appleby, the last to be demolished. Frasier Hall is seen to the right. (UAR Photo File)



Figure 9: Temporary South of Appleby, the last to be demolished. Frasier Hall is seen to the right. (UAR Photo File)

## Bibliography

Board of Regents Supplements. University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota.

Central Files (1928-1936). University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota.

Dienhart, Paul. "And Then There Was One." *Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), Nov., 1985.

Lehmberg, Stanford and Ann M. Pflaum. *The University of Minnesota: 1945-2000*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Lowen, J. Trout. "Temporary Buildings Have Historic Past." *Minnesota Daily* (St. Paul, MN), Aug. 24, 1987.

Lowen, J. Trout. "Appleby Hall Face Addition, Renovation." *Minnesota Daily* (St. Paul, MN), Aug. 25, 1987.

"'Neo-Classic' Wartime Architecture at the U." *Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), Jan. 23, 1947.

"News and Views." *Minnesota Alumnus* (Minneapolis, MN), October 1946.

"Temporary Buildings to Tumble, Making Room for New Project." *Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), Oct. 17, 1984.

"U Gets Surplus Navy Buildings." *St. Paul Dispatch* (St. Paul, MN), Jan. 23, 1947.

"U Says Goodbye to TSF Building" *St. Paul Dispatch* (St. Paul, MN), Nov. 22, 1973.

United States. 1948. *Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (Public Law 346, 78th Congress,*

*June 22, 1944) with amendments prior to September 23, 1950: and the Act Providing for Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Veterans (Public Law 16, 78th Congress, March 24, 1943) with amendments prior to August 11, 1948 and appendix of certain laws related thereto. Washington: U.S. G.P.O.*

University of Minnesota Building Files. University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota.

University of Minnesota Building Photograph Files. University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota.